

Lesson 7
James 3
Power of the Tongue and True Wisdom

Memory verse: “and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:15 NIV)

James has explained to us two characteristics of the mature Christian: he is patient in trouble (James 1) and he practices the truth (James 2). In this section, he shared the third characteristic of the mature believer he has power over his tongue.

A pastor was aware about a member of his church who was a notorious gossip. She would “hang on the phone” most of the day, sharing tid-bits with any and all who would listen.

She came to the pastor one day and said, “Pastor, the Lord has convicted me of my sin of gossip. My tongue is getting me and others into trouble.”

The pastor knew she was not sincere because she had gone through that routine before. Guardedly he asked, “Well, what do you plan to do?”

“I want to put my tongue on the altar,” she replied with pious fervour.

Calmly the pastor replied, “There isn’t an altar big enough,” and he left her to think it over.

The Christians that James wrote to were apparently having serious problems with their tongues. James had warned them to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19). The believer who does not bridle his tongue is not truly religious (James 1:26). We must speak and act as though we were already facing Christ in judgment (James 2:12). When you read passages like James 4:1, 11–12, you get the impression that this assembly must have had some interesting meetings!

The power of speech is one of the greatest powers God has given us. With the tongue, man can praise God, pray, preach the Word, and lead the lost to Christ. What a privilege! But with that same tongue he can tell lies that could ruin a man’s reputation or break a person’s heart. The ability to speak words is the ability to influence others and accomplish tremendous tasks, and yet we take this ability for granted.

In order to impress on us the importance of controlled speech, and the great consequences of our words, James gave us six pictures of the tongue: the bit, the rudder, fire, a poisonous animal, a fountain, and a fig tree. We can put these pictures into meaningful classifications that reveal the powers of the tongue.

As much as the tongue is an important organ of the human body, wisdom was just as an important thing to Jewish people. They realized that it was not enough to have knowledge; you had to have wisdom to be able to use that knowledge correctly. All of us know people who are very intelligent, perhaps almost geniuses, and yet who seemingly are unable to carry out the simplest tasks of life. They can program computers but they cannot manage their own lives! “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom” (Prov. 4:7).

James continued to exhort the people in the assembly who wanted to be teachers of the Word (James 3:1). It is not enough simply to stand before the people and say words; you must have something to say. This is where spiritual wisdom comes in. Knowledge enables us to take things apart, but wisdom enables us to put things together and relate God’s truth to daily life. All of us have heard preachers and teachers

who say many good things, but who somehow miss the heart of God’s message and fail to relate truth to everyday life. It is this kind of “knowledge without wisdom” that James was writing about. He was contrasting true wisdom and false wisdom in different aspects.

Things to learn: 1) Power of the tongue 2) True Wisdom 3) False Wisdom

Discussion Questions:

1) The tongue can be said as the World’s smallest but the largest trouble maker. How will verses 1 to 12 of James chapter 3 allow us to handle our tongue carefully?

2) Discuss the practical ways whereby the tongue can be used effectively for our Christian living.

3) What is the difference between True and False Wisdom and their outcomes in applications as brought to our attention in verses 13 to 18?